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Mr. *Sacheverell's*

SERMON,

Preach'd Before the

Univerſity *of* OXFORD,

Septemb. 14th, 1707.

Mr. Sterbrovell's

SERMON,

Preach'd Before the

University of OXFORD,

Sept. 1741.

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THE

Nature, Guilt, *and* Danger

OF

PRESUMPTUOUS SINS

Set Forth, In a

SERMON

PREACH'D Before the

University *of OXFORD*,

At St. *Mary*'s, *Septemb.* 14th. 1707.

BY

HENRY SACHEVERELL, M. A.

Fellow of *Magdalen-College*, OXON.

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SERMON, &c.

Numbers XV. 30, 31.

But the Soul that doth ought, Presumptuously, *(whether he be born in the Land, or a Stranger,) the same Reproacheth the Lord; and that Soul shall be cut off from among his People:*

Because, He hath Despis'd the Word of the Lord, and hath broken his Commandment, that Soul shall utterly be cut off, his Iniquity shall be upon him.

THERE cannot be an higher Demonstration, as well of the Impartial *Justice* of God, in His Government of the World, as of the *Excellency* of those *Laws*, whereby it is Administred, and Supported, than the Exact Distribution of *Rewards*, and *Punishments*, in both; proceeding always, according to the Different *Proportions* of *Vice*, and *Vertue*; Still Guarding *Duty* with an adequate *Sanction*, and as 'twere Adjusting the several *Degrees* of *Guilt*, in the *Weight*, and *Number* of its *Penalties*. Upon which account, We find in this part of the *Mosaick Institution*, a Series or Catalogue of Sins, *distinguish'd* from each other, by their *Rise*, and *Gradation*, their *Complexion*, and *Magnitude*, the many *Aggravating Circumstances*, wherewith they are Inhanc'd, and the *Peculiar Attonements* assign'd for them; to Convince Us, of the *Real Malignity* and *Intrinsick Turpitude* of Sin; that the *Pollution* of some Human Actions dos not proceed from the meer *Arbitrary Imposition* of God, or that the *Punishments*, He has annex'd to them, are the *Harsh Determinations* of a Tyrannical and Unjust *Severity*; but that they are the most Fit

and Proper *Motives*, to work upon our *Reason*, and *Passions*, that we may submit our selves to the Divine Will, and Law: whereby, our Sins are so nicely *Weigh'd in the Balance of the Sanctuary*, and so Equitably *estimated* according to the *Measures* of *Abatement*, or Degrees of *Provocation*, that the *Size*, and *Quality* of the Transgression, is always visible in the *Penalty* attending it. As for those Sins of a *Lower Class*, committed through that *Ignorance*, or *Infirmity*, to which Human Nature is often unavoidably Obnoxious, He, *who knoweth whereof we are made, and remembers, that we are but Dust*, did out of his Great Mercy condescend to Accept of an *Expiation* by *Sacrifice*, under the *Jewish Law*; and do's now, for much more Heinous Sins, (provided we repent) accept of the Inestimable Blood of the blessed *Sacrifice of the Lamb of God*, as a sufficient *Oblation*, and *Satisfaction* for their Guilt. Nevertheless, what *Punishment* can be too Great, what *Menaces* of Divine Vengeance too Rigid, to Deter Mankind from so Flagrant and Dreadful a *Degree* of Vice, as that of an Open, Wilful, Contumacious, and Obstinate Violation of God's Law; such an *Exorbitant* Pitch of Iniquity, as *without the most severe Repentance, cancels* and *supersedes* all *Propitiation*, Evacuates the Attonement of the Son of God, and Consigns over the Impudent Offender to an Irremissible State, and utter Incapacity of Pardon? *But the Soul that doth ought Presumptuously*, &c.

Ps. 103. 14.

Now this Law, being Built upon the Eternal Foundations of *Natural Reason*, and *Justice*, is not confin'd to the *Jewish Nation* only, nor barely to be extended to *Strangers*, or *Proselytes of the Gate*, but Includes *Gentiles*, as well as *Jews*, and is equally Applicable to all *Christians*; and is not (as some *Learned Writers* Critically remark) so much to be understood of any One, *Specifick*, Distinct, Kind of Sin in it self, as of a certain *Manner*, or (as the *Schools* speak) of a *common Accidental Difference*, or Circumstance of Aggravation, in the *Formal* way of Sinning, belonging to *all* Transgressions in *general*, whereby they are render'd more Heinous, and Provoking, and are therefore call'd *Sins of Presumption*, from the sad *Affinity* and *Analogy* they bear to that *Material* Great Sin of *Presumption*, eminently so stil'd; whereby, we boldly and arrogantly, presume on God's *Power*, *Mercy*, *Justice*, and *Goodness*, his *Assistance* without *Promise*, or *Revelation*, or his *Pardon*, and *Permission*, contrary to Either.

And, since We are so Prone in the Grand Concerns of our Salvation, and the Conduct of our Lives, to Flatter our selves with this Delusive

and

and *Fatal Confidence*, that most of those Errors We commit, may be *Cover'd* with the *Extenuating Plea* of *Ignorance*, or *Infirmity*, and consequently to be Expiated with a *General* or *Superficial Remorse*; which has so securely betray'd Millions, into everlasting *Perdition*; it is certainly a matter of the Highest *Importance*, and of the most Absolute *Necessity*, for the settling the *Peace* of our Consciences, upon a firm and unshaken Bottom, to Examine, what the *Distinguishing Marks* of those *Malicious*, and *Daring Sins* are, what their *Sorts* and *Degrees*, what their *Extent* and *Danger*; that We may be able to make the *Austerity* of our Repentance, *Commensurate* to the vast Load of their Guilt. For tho' God's *Mercy* is in it self, as *Infinite* as his *Nature*, (of which it seems to be his most *Delightful Attribute*) yet since He has been pleas'd to *Circumscribe* it, within *Evangelical Bounds*, beyond which, We cannot, (without the utmost *Presumption*,) *Claim*, or *Hope* for it; it is certainly, no *Insolence*, want of *Charity*, or *Derogation* from the All-sufficient *Merits of Christ*, to Assert, that We may by some the most *Flagitious*, and *Consummate Acts*, and *Habits* of *Unrepented Impiety*, Forfeit the Merciful Terms of the *Gospel-Covenant*, and Transgress beyond the Reach of *Grace*, or Conditions of *Remission*; and so draw down on Our selves the *Dismal Curse* mention'd in the Text, not only in a *Temporal*, but *Spiritual* Sense. To Prevent which, I shall Endeavour,

I. *First*, To Enquire into the *Nature*, and several *Kinds* of *Presumptuous Sins*. And
II. *Secondly*, To shew their Prodigious *Guilt*, and Dreadful *Danger*.

Now to make this Matter Clearer, before Us, it may not be Improper, to Premise this *Maxim*, *That the Guilt of All Sins, is to be measur'd, by the several Degrees of Consent, whereby they are Approv'd of, in the Will*, which renders them *more, or less Immoral*; for tho' every *Wicked Act* is either *lessen'd*, or *increas'd* in its *Obliquity*, with regard to the *Difference* of the *Law*, of which, 'tis a *Violation*, and the various *Circumstances* of *Time*, *Place*, and *Persons*, which Affect it, the *Matter*, whereof it *consists*, the *Means*, whereby it was *accomplish'd*, and the *End*, for which it was *Produc'd*, together with the sundry *Conditions* of *Light*, *Knowledge*, and *Assistance*, the *Agent* lay under; all which very much Alter the *Case* of the *Delinquent*, and either *Heighten*, or *Diminish* his Crime; yet the *Concurrence* of the *Will*, does chiefly *De-*

nominate and *Diſtinguiſh* it; and is of it ſelf, *ſufficient* to *change*, even the very *Nature* of an *Action*, render *Good*, *Evil*, *Indifferent* things, *Vicious*, and as the Scripture Elegantly ſpeaks, *to make Sin it ſelf, more Exceedingly ſinful.* So that of no leſs *Irrational*, than *Impious* Conſequence, are thoſe *Wild*, *Paradoxical Tenets* of the Ancient *Stoicks*, and Our Modern, *Rigid Predeſtinarians* (the moſt Abſurd *Philoſophers* of the Two) the *Firſt* whereof, by holding the *Equality* of All Sins, ſet the moſt *heinous Enormities* in Nature, ſuch as *Blaſphemy*, *Murder*, *Perjury*, *Adultery*, and the like, upon a Level, with the moſt *Pardonable Miſtakes*, and *Weakneſſes*; and the *Latter*, by inducing a Strange, *Fatal Neceſſity* of Sinning, *diſannul* its Guilt, render it a meer *Innocent* Notion, deſtroy the *Freedom of the Will*, take off all the *Odium*, and horrid *Dread* of Tranſgreſſions, and charge their *Malignity* upon the Fountain of all Good, *God Bleſſed for ever.*

This being in General Premis'd, as the *Foundation* of the following Diſcourſe, I proceed to the Subject propos'd, Namely,

I. *Firſt*, To Enquire into the *Nature*, and ſeveral *Kinds* of *Preſumptuous Sins.*

Now tho' this Copious and Fruitful Argument is as *wide* in its *Latitude*, as 'tis *neceſſary* in its *univerſal Uſe*, rightly to be underſtood, as taking into its Compaſs, ſo large a *Sphere* of *Practical Morality*, yet I conceive, the moſt *Conſiderable Caſes* belonging to it, may be *Comprehended* under, or *Reduc'd* to, one of theſe following Particulars, Namely,

1. *Firſt*, Sinning either with a *Wilful Ignorance*, or againſt *Poſitive Knowledge.*
2. *Secondly*, Sinning *Without*, or Complying with *Small*, or Running into *Great*, *Temptations.*
3. *Thirdly*, Sinning againſt the *Means of Grace*, or after *Signal Judgments*, and *Mercies.*
4. *Fourthly*, *Perſevering* without *Remorſe*, or *Shame*, in the *Habitual* Commiſſion of *Many* Offences, or any *One Darling* Sin, with the vain *Hopes* of *Repentance*, and *Pardon.*

1. And *Firſt*, Sinning with a *Wilful Ignorance.* As all Laws both of *God*, and *Nature*, Exempt Us from the Imputation of Guilt, in Caſes of *Invincible Ignorance*, ſo on the other hand, they induce an *Indiſpenſable Obligation*, both of *Knowledge* and *Obedience*, when they are

are *Promulg'd*, and *Understood*. Where our Duty lies Level to Our *understanding*, and suited to Our *Practice*, to Neglect it, is to *Presume* upon the *Mercy*, and *Goodness* of the *Lawgiver*, neither can the fault of *One* be then Pleaded in Defence of the *Other*. *Non putaram* is the *Apology* of a Sot, and was never alledg'd but by such *Fools*, as thought to Justify *one Crime*, by the commission of a *Worse*. This is, as if a Man should shut his Eyes, and pretend Blindness, or put out the *Candle of the Lord*, on purpose to wander in the dark. He that has the advantage of a *Sure Guide* to shew him the Road, if He refuses his Counsel, can never Answer for his Conduct, in Losing it. Many of the Lines of *Humane Duty* are drawn so plain and visible in Our Natures, that nothing can *Efface*, or *Obliterate* them, but what *Extinguishes* Our *Reason*; insomuch that the *Apostle* says, *it left the very Gentiles* that were Ignorant *of it, without Excuse.* And if *Ignorance* could not be allow'd in vindication of *them*, who wanted a clearer *Revelation*, can it be urg'd in behalf of such, as enjoy the Happiness of the *Glorious Light of the Gospel*? wherein all its Precepts are written, as 'twere with a *Sun-beam*, that *He that Runs may read them*; and a Man may be as well Ignorant of his Own heart, wherein they lye so deeply Engraven, as of this *Handwriting of Ordinances*; nay it must be as *hard* as the *Stone* on which, the Commandments were Inscrib'd, not to perceive 'em, at first view, Legible: to walk thus in Darkness, in the midst of *Goshen*, and of that *Light*, *that lightneth every Man that cometh into the World*, is to Grope and Stumble in *Egyptian Error*, at Mid-day, and to abuse the Blessed Means of Knowledge, that Providence has provided Us, to Direct Us safely in the way of Truth and Salvation; and is doubtless, a very *Wilful* and *Presumptuous Sin*. *Rom* 1. 20.

2. But, Secondly, if the Sins We commit through this bare Neglect of Information, which are as 'twere *Negative Crimes*, are of so great Obliquity, an *Affected* and *Studied Ignorance*, is a Sin of an higher Degree, of a more Daring and *Presumptuous* Nature. Wherein, We industriously Labour to *Blind* the *Eye* of our *Reason*, and *Faith*, to Shun that Knowledge, that would prevent Our Transgressions, and to shut our *Ears against the Voice of the Charmer*, least *We should be Converted and heal'd*. We fly from the *Light because Our Deeds are Evil*, and skulk in Obscurity, to avoid their Discovery. When Men *hate Knowledge, and will not chuse the Fear of the Lord, when they will have none of his Counsel, and despise all his Reproof*; this is an Ignorance that God will be so far from *Winking at*, that He will punish it with *Infatuation* *Job* 3. 19. *Prov.* 1. 29, 30.

and

and Deluſion, by giving up ſuch *Volunteers* in the *Devil's Service*, to receive the *Wages of Sin*, *to eat the Fruit of their Own ways*, and *be fill'd with their Own Devices*. The Former ſort of *Ignorance*, may be look'd upon as an Act of ſupine *Sloth*, and *Oſcitancy*, wherein We do, as 'twere careleſsly Paſs by, forget, and overlook Our Duty; but this carries *Premeditated Malice* in it, 'tis *caſting the Law behind Our Backs*, endeavouring to Evade its Force, by a Mean *Subterfuge*, or crafty *Equivocation*, to commit Sin with the proſpect of an *Excuſe*, to *cloath our Nakedneſs* with *pitiful Fig-leaves*, and with a Blaſphemous Credulity Imagine to put upon the *Omniſcience*, and Delude the *Omnipotence* of God. This is a Second Degree of Sinning through *Wilful*, and *Preſumptuous Ignorance*.

Prov. 1. 31.

3. But, Thirdly, *Sinning againſt Poſitive and expreſs Knowledge*, is yet a farther pitch of *Aggravation*. This Crime *riſes*, and *falls*, according to the *Advancement*, or *Imperfection*, of the Delinquent's *Underſtanding*: Nay, with regard to the ſame Perſon, it *Alters*, with reſpect to his *various Circumſtances*. As We may learn from that inſtructive *Parable* about the *Talents*, from whence Our *Bleſſed Saviour* has Authoriz'd Us to conclude, that God will proceed with Mankind, at the great day of Final Retribution, not in an *Arithmetical*, but a *Geometrical Proportion*, *expecting* and *Judging* the Performance of our Duty, reſponſibly to the *Endowments*, *Gifts*, and *Abilities*, that He has ſeverally *Diſpens'd* to every *Individual Man*. So that this Sin is in ſome *Greater*, and in others *Leſs*, but in all *inexcuſable*. To run counter to the manifeſt *Light* and poſitive *Dictates* of *Reaſon*, in any thing, that it expreſsly *Forbids*, or *Commands*, in deſpight of the *Contradictions*, and *Convictions* of Our *Conſcience*, the *Suggeſtions*, *Perſwaſions*, and *Menaces* of the *Bleſſed Spirit*, within Us, in matters of fact Notorious, evident, and indiſputable, is doubtleſs a very high and audacious act of *Preſumption*. *If I had not come*, (ſays Our Saviour) *and ſpoken amongſt them, they had not had Sin, but now they have no Cloak for their Sin*. And *if* (as St. *James* affirms) *to him that knoweth to do Good, and doth it not, to him it is a Sin*, that is, of *Omiſſion*, (as St. *Paul* ſays) much more ſo to him, that *knoweth the Judgment of* God, *that they who commit ſuch things are worthy of Death, not only doth the ſame*, but *takes pleaſure in thoſe that do them*. But even this heinous Tranſgreſſion is yet capable of one *degree* more of *Aggravation*. When the Criminal is not *Surpriz'd*, or *over-born* by his *Paſſions*, or by ſly *Inſinuations* entic'd and allur'd into ſome Vicious action, but with a *Reſolute Calmneſs*, and *ſedate Deliberation*, takes time and Leiſure to *adviſe* with himſelf, and

Matth. 25. 14.

John 15. 22.

James 4. 17.

Rom. 1. 32.

Ponders

Ponders every *Motive*, and *Circumstance*, *Weighs* the *Temporal Advantages* and *Pleasures* on the one hand, and the *Eternal Punishments* and *Divine Vengeance* on the other; and yet maugre all the *Arguments* of his *Reason*, and *Decisions* of his *Judgment*, will follow his Own wicked *Inclinations*, fulfil his Lewd *Desires*, and Accomplish his *Worldly ends*; this is so Dreadful and *Presumptuous* a way of Sinning, that nothing can *Extenuate* its Flagitiousness, or mitigate its Guilt. And yet as Slight, as *Ambitious*, *Covetous*, *Time-serving*, *Profane Libertines*, and *Atheistical Debauchees* make of this Tremendous matter, who can with Shameless Foreheads, and obdurate Hearts, commit such *Deadly* and *Damning Impieties*, there is no one *Flagrant*, and *Deliberate* Act of Vice but falls under this *Hellish Character*: As all *Hypocrisy*, (particularly that Quintessence of *Fanaticism*, *Occasional Conformity*) *Betraying the Church* in *its Doctrine or Discipline*, *Lying*, *Fornication*, *Adultery*, *Perjury*, *Murder*, *Rebellion*, *Sacriledge*, &c. and the like, if there can be any other Sins in the *Devil's Catalogue* of a more *Crimson Dye*, committed against the Reluctance of *Conscience*, and the *Commands*, and *Laws*, of *God* and *Men*.

Now in all these *Gross* and *palpable Points*, there is not onely a full *Concurrence*, but a peremptory *Election* of the *Will*, overbearing, and as it were forcing the *Intellectual Powers*, to a *sordid Compliance*. For Men usually in these Cases, act with Subtle *contrivance*, and anxious *Forecast*, *Jer.* 4. 22 they are *Wise to do Evil* (as the *Prophet* speaks) like *crafty Politicians* they lay *Plots* and *Schemes* of Iniquity, Sin with *Artifice* and *Stratagem*, and as dextrous *Professors*, that are Skill'd in the *Mystery of Ungodliness*, Cultivate and manage every piece of Villany to advantage, suck out all the Poyson, and *Drain* the very last Drop of *Pleasure*, and *Profit*, that it contains.

Out of the Great Number of *Examples*, that the Scriptures so plentifully abound with, to illustrate this Matter, I shall only produce *Two* of each Kind. The First is, that Astonishing Instance of a *wilful* and *affected* Ignorance, in that Obstinate, Perverse, and Wayward Nation of the *Jews*; a Nation Rais'd, Supported, Govern'd, and Deliver'd, by a continual and uninterrupted Series of a *Miraculous Providence*; to whom, as the Peculiar *Favourites* of Heaven, were committed the *Oracles of God*, and his Will reveal'd by a *Successive Mission* of Prophets after Prophets, to instruct, warn, invite, and threaten them into a Sense of their Duty, with repeated *Mercies* and *Judgments*, of both which they so deeply Tasted, but in vain: tho' their

their *Law* was ſo *Intelligible*, and the *Predictions* of the *Meſſiah* and *Goſpel-Diſpenſation* ſo *Evident*, that nothing but their forc'd and falſe *Gloſſes* could *obſcure* the *One*, and their ſtudied *Obſtinacy*, induce them to *reject* the *Other*; yet by their long Abuſe of all theſe Divine Priviledges, they Endeavour'd to *make the Counſel of God of none effect*, and fulfill'd that ſtrange Prophecy of *Eſaias* upon themſelves, which ſaith, *By hearing Ye* Matt. 13. 14. &c. *ſhall hear, and ſhall not underſtand; and ſeeing Ye ſhall ſee, and not perceive; for this People's Heart is waxed groſs, and their Ears are dull of hearing; and their Eyes they have clos'd, leſt at any time they ſhould ſee with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and ſhould underſtand with their Heart, and ſhould be converted, and I ſhould heal them.*

Again, there is not in the whole Body of the *Sacred Hiſtory* a more Execrable Inſtance of *Preſumptuouſly Sinning againſt Poſitive Knowledge*, than in the Example of *Ahab*, who is *Emphatically Stigmatiz'd* by the 1 *King.* 16. 33. Holy Ghoſt with the abominable Character, of *provoking the Lord God* 1 *King.* 21. 20. *of Iſrael to Anger, more than all the Kings of Iſrael that were before him*, nay, of *having ſold himſelf to work Wickedneſs in the ſight of the Lord*; as if he had *Bargain'd* with the Devil, for the *higheſt Poſt* in the *Kingdom of Darkneſs*, and had *Barter'd* his Soul for a more *exquiſite Degree* of *Damnation*. Among the many Flagitious Acts, whereby he *Signaliz'd* his *wicked Reign*, and render'd it *Odious* to all Poſterity, we find moſt particularly recorded, with all the *Circumſtances of Aggra-* Lev. 25. 23, 25. Numb. 36. 7. *vation*, that *Imperial* Villany in the Murder of *Naboth* the *Jezreelite*; Becauſe the poor Innocent Man would not, contrary to the *Expreſs Command* of the Law, *Alienate* his *Paternal Inheritance*, this *curſed Tyrant* by the Inſtigation and Contrivance of his Two *Privy Coun-* 2 *Kings* 23. *ſellors*, the *Devil* and his *Wife*, for the more Solemnity and *Sanctification* of this Tranſcendent Wickedneſs, firſt orders a *Faſt to be proclaim'd*, then *Naboth* to be ſet up on high, before a pretended *Court of Juſtice*, to ſentence him to Death for *Blaſphemy*, by the *falſe Accuſation* of Two *ſuborn'd Witneſſes*. What an horrid *Complication* of Sins were there here join'd in One, *Oppreſſion*, *Robbery*, *Hypocriſy*, *Perjury*, *Murder*, to ſatisfy Us that a *Preſumptuous Crime* ſcarce ever goes *Single!*

II. But *Secondly*, The next Kind of *Preſumptuous* Sins I mention'd was, *Sinning without*, *Complying with Small*, or *Running into Great*, *Temptations*.

1. And *Firſt*, Sinning *without any Temptation* at all. When there is no Motive, either of *Real Pleaſure*, *Honour*, or *Profit*, to *induce* Us to

to the Commission of it; when out of a *false Principle* of *Vain-Glory*, or *Singularity*, an *Ostentation* of being above the *Check* or *Controul* of *Law*, *Reason*, or *Faith*, or a *Diabolical*, Monstrous, *Malignity of Nature*, *delighting in Evil*, Men seek Opportunities of becoming Sceptical, Profligate, and Cruel; and in cool Thoughts, when their *Passions* and *Intellectuals* are less disturb'd, they bid Defiance to *God*, his *Truth*, and his *Power*; such as are, the *Denying* or *Questioning* the great *Mysteries of our Religion*, *Ridiculing*, or *Blaspheming* God's *Word*, or *Providence*, Irreverently *Profaning* his Holy *Name*, in common *Oaths* or *Imprecations*, or *Asserting*, and *Propagating Corrupt*, *Seditious*, *Lewd*, *Schismatical*, or *Latitudinarian Principles*, with a virulent Intention of spreading *Poison*, and doing *Mischief*: Or when Men of *Invidious* and *Black Dispositions*, purely to gratify their *Spleen* or *Rancour*, secretly *repine* at their Neighbour's Happiness, and without any Prospect of Advantage to themselves, give an *Underhand Stab* to his *Fortune*, or *Character*: To these, we may add the *Old Debauchees*, who when they are grown *Maim'd*, and *Emerit* in the *Devil's Service*, and are left *Impotent*, and *Vanquish'd* by their beloved *Wine* and *Women*, when the *Act of Vice* has quite forsaken their *decay'd* and *rotten Constitutions*, rejoice to view its Commission in *others*, enjoy it at *second-hand*, *play* over their *former Lives*, in their own Filthy *Imaginations*, call up the *Ghost* of their *departed Sin*, and are perhaps more Lascivious in their *Thoughts*, than they were before, in their *Practices*. In all these Cases, Men *act* the *Tempter's* Part upon themselves, and are most *Presumptuously* Wicked, without *sufficient Allurement*, *Provocation*, or *Gain*.

2. Secondly, *Complying with small Temptations*, *is another kind of Presumptuous Sinning*. As the *Greatness* of the *Temptation*, and *Power* of *Inducement*, do *Mitigate* the Guilt on the one hand; so by a Parity of Reason, on the other, must its *Little Influence*, and the *Capacity* of *Resistance* in the Offender, *aggravate* and *inhance* his Crime. For here, tho' he stands *ready* and *prepar'd* to meet his Enemy, he *throws down his Arms*, basely *Capitulates*, and *Surrenders* upon the first *Onset*. A Man that thus Dishonourably *gives up* himself, wants only an *Opportunity* to be a *Traytor* to his Cause; whereas, nothing but the *Last Opposition* can Acquit the *spiritual Souldier* thus *fortify'd* with the *Succours* of *Strength* and *Grace*; he must *dispute* his Ground, *Foot by Foot*, and like a True *Christian Champion*, rather Dye upon the Spot, than Yield the least Point to the *Powers of the Kingdom of Darkness*. God do's indeed out of his Infinite Mercy, make some *Allowances* for the

Inevitable *Infirmities* of Our *Nature*, whereby we are often *surpriz'd* into Evil, and *overtaken* by a quick and sudden Temptation, before we could well view its *Danger*, Guard against, or Prevent its *Attacque*; or where, (possibly we having *Leisure* or *Will* to do this) the *Violence* of Our *Passions* may perhaps Overbear Our Intentions, and the frequent *Returns*, and almost irresistible *Assaults* of *sensual Enjoyments*, prove too Powerful for *Flesh* and *Blood* to Encounter and Subdue: In this *Combat*, wherein he does not *Cowardly desert his Colours*, the *Just Man* may be said to *fall seven times a day*, and yet to maintain his *Post* and *Character*, tho' he may be frequently *defeated* in it. But least we should be too *Favourable* to our selves, in that worst and most fatal Self-Flattery of *Excusing* or *Lessening* our Crimes, we *must carefully observe*, that even the Sins of *Infirmity*, howsoever *Pardonable* in themselves, may become *Sins of Presumption*, when we are *wilfully deficient* in our *honest Endeavours* to guard our blind-side, to *watch* against those Vices that *so easily beset us*, and lose the *Victory* through a *Culpable Neglect*; which he is grossly Guilty of, who is so far from fencing against, that he *Anticipates* the *Dull* and *Lingring Temptation*, is not so much *caress'd* into, as *courts* his own *Slavery*, prevents Importunity, *closes in* with the first Offer, and lazily suffers himself to *fall into the Devil's Snare, and be taken Captive by him, at his Will.*

2 *Tim.* 2. 26.

3. Thirdly, Next to *Complying with Small, is Running into Great Temptations*, which is a different Instance of *Presumption*. Tho' a Man is never so well assur'd of the *Strength* of his *Reason*, and the *Steadiness* of his *Resolution*, to undergo the greatest *Difficulties* and *Trials*; tho' he should (as our Blessed Saviour says) like *one King going to make War against another, sit down first, and consult, whether he be able with Ten Thousand, to meet him that cometh against him, with Twenty Thousand*; (which great odds, as it must be always expected, is enough to make any Man, thus *Out-number'd*, doubt of Success;) tho' he should by a strange, and unaccountable *Fortune*, gain the *Day*, yet he scarcely deserves, either Thanks, or Reward, for a Victory, he so rashly and unadvisedly *Hazarded* at the *Expence* of his *Ruine*; and if he is *Beaten*, may not unjustly be Condemn'd for his *Fool-hardiness*, and Indiscretion. A Man may as well *touch Pitch, and be undefil'd*, or *go upon Coals, and not be burnt*, as engage prevailing *Allurements*, or *Occasions* of Evil, without *forfeiting*, or *betraying* his *Vertue*; All *Caution* in this Insidious Case may prove vain, we are *catch'd* and *intangl'd* before we *think*, or are *aware* of it; Nay, tho' we sometimes

Luk. 14. 31.

Eccl. 13. 1. Prov. 6. 28

see

see our *Destruction* before us, we may *slide* on the *smooth, slippery* way, inevitably into it. There is a strange *Deceitfulness in Sin,* (as the Holy Ghost expresses it) which may *beguile* and *infatuate* the *wisest Man* upon Earth; and no one can be Secure against a Fall, that *goes in the midst of Snares*, or *walks upon the Battlements of a City.* The Bewitching Temptations of *Riches, Honour, Pleasure*, and *Beauty*, prove too often an Over-match for our Reason; and those Bold Combatants, that are to *wrestle*, not only *against Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World, against spiritual Wickedness in high places*; *had need to take unto them, the whole Armour of God, that they may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*; that when they *are tried, they may be found faithful, blameless, and harmless, the Sons of God without Rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation.* But what Man can have such an infallible Assurance of his own Heart, *(which is deceitful above all things, who can know it)* as without *the Shield of Faith*, and the *Breast-plate of Righteousness*, to open his Bosom, and expose it to all the *fiery Darts* of an indefatigable, and implacable Enemy; and especially, when 'tis as much *betray'd within*, as *beset without*, what a *presumptive Madness* is it, causelessly to venture in such a Danger? where he may probably be bereft of the *Protection* of the *Grace of God*, and given up to the *cruel Mercy* of the Devil? This may prove an uncall'd for, and unjustifiable Walking thro' a *Fire Ordeal*, not so much to prove our Innocence, as to incur Guilt; 'tis like St. *Peter*'s (who was a Sorrowful instance of human infirmity) treading on the *faithless Deep*, where, without immediate Divine Assistance, a Man must *sink* and *perish.* He that engages in this perilous Enterprise, knows not where it will end; and this *vain Confidence* has often foil'd the stoutest *Heroes in Christianity*, and brought them to a shameful *Defeat* and *Repentance*, for *trusting too much to their own Strength*, without the Aids of Grace, in difficult, and *unwarrantable Circumstances.* So great Reason have the best of Men to *pray not to enter into Temptation*; *to set* (as it were) *Scourges over their Thoughts, and the Discipline of Wisdom over their Hearts*; *to flee from Sin as from the face of a Serpent, not to come near it, least it bite us*; *for the Teeth thereof are as the Teeth of a Lion, slaying the Souls of Men*; *like a two-edg'd Sword, that cannot be touch'd, without a Wound, which cannot be heal'd.* To *converse* within the *Infection* of the *Plague*, and to *visit* the *Confines* of *Death*, is certainly the most ready way to *catch* the *one*, and *fall* into the *other.*

Heb. 3. 13. Eccles. 9. 12. Eph. 6. 12. Ph. 2. 15. Jer. 17. 9. Eccles. 21. 2, 3.

III. Thirdly, *The next Kind of Presumptuous Sins, is against the Visible Means of Grace, or after signal Judgments, or Mercies.* By the *Means of Grace,* I understand not here, the *Internal Operations* of the *Blessed Spirit,* on our Souls, Sinning against which, I have already observ'd to be a heinous Degree of *Presumption,* and which in some degree attends *all other sorts* of it: But here, 'tis rather meant of all those *External Gifts,* and *Favours,* which Providence bestows upon us, as the *Means* of *doing Good* in the World, and being *Serviceable,* either to *God,* our *Country,* or our *Friends,* in promoting their *Glory,* or *Interest* in *Church,* or *State.* Such as are, *Wealth, Honour, Reputation, Authority, Power,* with the noble *Faculties,* and useful *Endowments* of *Mind,* or *Body;* as *Learning, Wit,* and *Eloquence, Health, Strength, Address, Beauty,* and the like; which are given, as so many mighty *Blessings,* and *Talents,* for *Excellent Ends;* and when *mis-spent,* or *abus'd,* in the base Purposes of *Avarice, Ambition, Pride,* or *Lust;* or any ways *imbezzel'd,* or *misemploy'd,* draw a fearful Reckoning down, on the *Presumptuous Offender.*

But among all the *External Means of Grace,* the Divine *Mercies,* and *Judgments* Signally shewn, ought to have the most quick and powerful Influence upon Our Thoughts, being as 'twere the *manifest Display* of God's *Favour,* or *Vengeance* upon Us, which should either *Melt* down the most *Flinty* heart into a pious Sense of *Gratitude,* and *Praise,* or into an humble *Acknowledgment* of, and *Submission* to, the Hand that Blesses, or Smites Us. *Prosperity,* and *Success,* should make Us Naturally remember the *Kind Benefactor;* and *Distress,* and *Affliction, Whet,* and *Sharpen* the Soul, Rouse and Awake a Stupify'd and *Lethargick Conscience,* and like the *Hand-writing on the Wall,* strike Terror, Astonishment, and Remorse, even into a *Belshazzar,* carousing in the midst of *Wine, Women,* and *Banquets.* But the Man whom neither *Mercy* can *Soften,* nor *Punishment Terrify* into *Duty,* is under a worse State of *Impenitency,* and *Obduration,* than *Pharaoh, Manasseh,* or *Nebuchadnezzar.* To Sin under these *Provoking* Circumstances, is to *Spit* in the Face of Providence, *Kick* at Omnipotence, *baffle* and *Disappoint* all its tender *Designs* upon Us, and in the appositе Language of the *Prophet,* to *turn Judgment into Gall, and the fruit of Righteousness, into Hemlock.* What greater Obligations can there be to Piety and Religion, than the Visible Demonstrations of God's Blessing in our *Success,* or *Advancement,* in *Supporting* Us under, or *Delivering* Us out of, any pressing Disaster, Calamity, or Danger? These are *Times of Encourage-*

Amos 6. 12.

couragement, and *Trial*, and Opportunities of Exemplifying a more than ordinary *Thanksgiving*, *Humility*, *Patience*, and *Obedience*. We may observe the just Reflections that the *Holy Ghost* has made upon those Two remarkable Instances of *Both*, *Hezekiah*, and *Ahaz*. To the *One*, as the Reward of his *Eminent Vertues*, God had given for the most part, a very *Prosperous Reign*, had promoted him to more Honour, Riches, and Glory, than any Prince, next to *Solomon*, that sate upon the Throne of *David*; He Deliver'd him by two Astonishing *Miracles* out of the most perilous Circumstances, the *Danger* he was in from his powerful Enemy *Sennacherib*, and a *Mortal Distemper*; Blessings one would think, worth perpetual Acknowledgment! Yet it is said, *Hezekiah render'd not agen, according to the Benefit done unto Him: for his Heart was lifted up, therefore there was Wrath upon him, and upon Judah, and Jerusalem. For in the business of the Embassadors of the Princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the Wonder, that was done in the Land, God left him to Try him, that He might know all that was in his heart*, and accordingly punish'd his *Pride* in the *Scandal*, and Misery of his *Posterity*. But *Ahaz* was the very *Reverse* of his Son, and most exorbitantly Wicked, and therefore God visited him throughout his *impious Reign*, with a continued Series of *Plagues* and *Troubles*, which were so far from bringing him to a *Sense* of his Crimes, that when God had *Surrounded* him with innumerable Hosts of Enemies, who laid his Kingdom in *bloud* and *desolation*, led Captive one part, and slew the other with a *rage that reach'd unto heaven*, and left the Land as *Naked* of Inhabitants, as of God's Protection, yet even under these *dismal Extremities*, it is *emphatically* observ'd of him, that *in this time of his Distress, did He trespass yet more and more, against the Lord*. For which *Incorrigible* and *Diabolical* Temper, whereby he did as 'twere Defy, and *set himself against* God, the Holy Ghost has fix'd this infamous Brand upon his Character, to distinguish him, for a most audacious Sinner, to all Eternity, *This is* That *Ahaz!* Such unpardonable *Ingratitude*, and exasperating *Presumption* is it, to abuse the *Mercy*, and *Long-suffering* of God, to Spurn at his Rod, and *Revolt when We are Smitten*, and not perceive the *Wound*, or endeavour the *Cure*, *when his Arrows stick fast in Us, and his Hand presseth Us sore*.

2 Chron. 32. 25.

Vers. 31.

2 Chron. 28.

Ps. 38. 2.

IV. Lastly, *Persevering without Remorse, or Shame, in the Habitual Commission of Many Offences, or any one Darling Sin, with the Vain Hopes of Repentance, or Pardon, is an exceeding Presumptuous Sin.* There cannot be Invented by the *Wit* of Man or the *Sophistry* of the *Grand Deceiver*

of

of Souls, any Two more *Erroneous Opinions*, or more directly and fatally Destructive of all *Practical Christianity*, than those *Absurd Tenets*, of the *Unlimited Mercy of God, thro' Christ's Sufferings, so as that they may be Extended to the utterly Impenitent, and most Harden'd Wretches*: and that *Enthusiastick*, arrogant Notion of *God's Absolute Decree of uncovenanted Salvation, to certain Favourite Persons, without any the least respect had, to their Qualifications, or Demeanours:* both which Opinions do in a manner, Disannul the *Conditions* of the *Covenant*, Abrogate the *Necessity* of *Repentance*, and permit the most *Insolent Offenders*, to run on with Comfort, and Alacrity, in their Vices, without *check* or *Regret* of *Conscience*. Upon these Two equally *False Foundations*, Men are apt to Flatter themselves that the *Day of Grace* can never be *pass'd*, that they can *Reform* themselves, when they please, and that tho' they Offer to *come in* at the very *Last Hour*, they shall be *Admitted*, and never Deny'd Entrance: With this *Alluring Prospect*, they resolve to enjoy the *Pleasures* of *Sin*, together with the *Hopes* of being *Sav'd*, take their full *Swinge* of Iniquity, and when They have *Squeez'd* out all the *Satisfaction*, and *Profit* they can, then to Relinquish it; and when they are *fit for nothing else*, Sit down and Reflect a while, upon their Follies. Now to *Sin* with a bare Intention to *Repent* of it, afterwards, is to *do Despight to the Grace of God*, in order to Obtain it; that is, in other words, Affronting *all* the *Divine Attributes*, yet depending on that *Single* one of his *Mercy*. But tho' God has graciously promis'd *Pardon* to all those that *truly Repent*, yet He has no where promis'd the *Grace of Repentance*, to such as *Slight*, and *Abuse* His Holy Spirit, which alone can bestow it. Of such vast importance is that excellent Advice of the *Wise Man*, *Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath happen'd unto Me? for tho' the Lord is long-suffering, He will in no wise let Thee go. Concerning Propitiation, be not without fear, to add Sin unto Sin. And say not his Mercy is great; he will be pacify'd for the Multitude of my Sins; for Mercy, and Wrath come from him, and his Indignation resteth upon Sinners. Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the Wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy Security, Thou shall't be destroy'd, and perish in the day of Vengeance. Therefore Bind not one Sin upon another, for in one, Thou shall't not be Unpunish'd.*

Eccius. 5. 4, &c.

Chap 7. verf. 8.

There is another Sort of *Demure* and *Reserv'd* Sinners, who out of regard to the *World's Censure*, or their Own *Reputation*, will not live in the Commission of any *Flagrant*, and *Scandalous* Vice, but Stick not in *Private*, at those of a *Lesser Quality*, which are Suited to their

Parti-

Particular *Humour*, *Interest*, or *Constitution*, in which they think they may with Impunity *Indulge* themselves, and Persevere, without Reluctance. *Oh! this is but Little one, and their Souls shall Live.* They will *Compound* to hold these *Bosom-Sins* undisturb'd, to Rail most devoutly at All others: thus the *Covetous* Man will condemn *Sensuality*, and *Extravagance*, the *Epicure* Declaim against *Avarice*; and the like, in all *Opposite* Sins. Now tho' the *Danger* of these Crimes (however *Little* in *themselves*) is very Great, in that they pass *Unobserv'd*, are easily *admitted*, and insensibly *Steal* upon Us, grow frequent, ordinary, and at length *Habitual*; and tho' they make up in *Number*, what they want in *Weight*; yet passing thus for mere *Inadvertencies*, or *Infirmities*, seldom bring the Delinquent to a *particular Repentance*, which all *Voluntary Transgressions* certainly Require. But it is undoubtedly sure, that God's *Sovereignty* and *Authority* is equally Impeach'd and Oppugn'd, in the transgression of any *branch* of his Commands; there is no *Dispensation* for any part of Our Duty, as by way of *Commutation* for the rest; and whoever chuses finally to persist in any particular Sin, tho' *He shall keep the whole Law besides, and Offend in that One point, is Guilty of all.* Jam. 2. 10.

Thus I have endeavour'd in as short a Compass, as this copious Matter would permit, to shew the *True Nature*, and Point out the *Several Sorts* of *Presumptuous Sins*. I proceed

II. In the Second place *to Evince their Prodigious Guilt, and Dreadful Danger, that We may Avoid them.*

And first, as to *their Guilt*, which is set out in the Text, in the highest Expressions of *Aggravation*, the Sense whereof, I shall Comprehend and Draw out, in these following Particulars.

1. Because they are Committed against the *Light* of *Reason*, and the *Conviction* of *Conscience*.
2. Because they proceed from an *Open Contempt of God's Laws*, and do *Reproach his Power and Majesty*.
3. Because they strangely *lay waste* the Conscience, and in time, produce an *Habitual Necessity* of Sinning.
4. Because they *Judicially* draw down the *Wrath and Vengeance* of God upon Us, by *Quenching His Holy Spirit* within Us.

1. And first, *The Guilt of these Presumptuous Sins is very Great, because*

cauſe they are Committed againſt the Light of Reaſon, and the Convictions of Conſcience. Sins of Infirmity Slide inſenſibly upon the Soul, and as 'twere *Steal* the Conſent of the Will. A Vicious Thought riſes up, almoſt imperceptibly in it, and *Surprizes* a Man into Evil. But theſe *Outragious* and *Daring Sins* Preſent their *Over-grown* and *Monſtrous Bulk* in full view, at a Diſtance, they *give Warning* of their Approach, raiſe an *Alarm* and *Uproar* in the Underſtanding, and give it time to Recollect, and Muſter its Forces, to Deliberate on the Danger, call in Divine Aſſiſtance, and having done all, to Withſtand the Adverſary, with a vigorous Reſiſtance. Now in ſpight of all theſe Advantages, not only Cowardly to Submit to, but baſely and Treacherouſly to Cloſe in with the Enemy, notwithſtanding the *Repreſentations*, *Advices*, and *Menaces*, of that *Faithful Monitor*, *God's Vice-Gerent* within Us, is to do Violence to Our Nature, to *Un-Man* our Selves, and to Sink Us lower, than the very *Beaſts that periſh*. A Man muſt *Enlarge* his Con-
Hab. 2. 5. ſcience, *as Hell*, and his Appetite be as inſatiable *as Death*, and the *Grave*, thus with his Eyes open, to Swallow Damnation in groſs. And if Crimes committed thro' meer *Ignorance* ſtand in need of *Mercy*, and the
1 *Tim.* 1. *Propitiation* of a *Saviour's Merits*, (as St. *Paul* tells Us in his Own Caſe)
13. what Judgment, what Condemnation muſt await that impudent and reſolute Criminal, that dares to Stifle and Outface his Convictions,
Luke 12. and to Break through all Bounds and Reſtraints? *The Servant that*
47. *knew his Lord's Will, and did it not, ſhall be Beaten with many Stripes.*

2. Secondly, *The Guilt of theſe Preſumptuous Sins, is very Great, becauſe they proceed from an Open Contempt of God's Laws, and do reproach his Power, and Majeſty.* And thus the Original *Hebrew*, with an Admirable *Emphaſis*, and Significancy of Expreſſion, calls it, in the Text, *Sinning with an high hand*, which we render *Preſumptuouſly*. Now were ſuch Crimes committed thro' an Actual *Disbelief*, or Atheiſtical *Denial* of God's Being, poſſibly they might ſeem to be leſs *Preſumptive*; but to acknowledge his Sovereignty and Juſtice, and at the ſame time trample upon, and deſpiſe it, to *ſpit upon him*, with an *Hail King of the Jews*, to ſet at naught his Laws, and mock and ridicule the Almighty Creator, and Governour of all things, with a *Tuſh, God thou careſt not for it*; to prefer the Service of the Devil, or an empty and tranſitory Enjoyment, or the Fears of Men, before the conſideration of Heavenly Pleaſures, and Eternal Vengeance; or like *Judas*, to ſell our Saviour for the *Price of a Slave*; is ſuch Folly, and Madneſs, ſuch a Dreadful Affront, and Contumelious Diſdain, and Provocation, from

Duſt

Dust and Ashes, against the *Great God*, as did not his Infinite Mercy interpose, would *call down Fire from Heaven*, to strike the Daring Offender, dead upon the spot, for such unparallel'd *Rebellion*.

3. Thirdly, *The Guilt of Presumptuous Sins is very Great, because they strangely lay waste the Conscience, and in time, produce a sort of Habitual Necessity of Sinning.* It is the Opinion of some *School-Writers*, that a single Commission of a very Gross and Flagitious Crime is *Equal* to an *Habit* of the same, as containing in it the *Force* of many *Lesser Acts*, or a Complication of many Enormities together; as the Commission of *Adultery*, *Murder*, and the like; wherein, there can never be *Restitution* made: Whether this will absolutely hold True, or not, has been question'd by many *Learned Divines*, and I shall not pretend at present to Determine; but I think it can hardly be doubted, but that One single Commission of this *high Nature* implying a *deliberate* and *perverse Election* of the *Will*, may possibly prove of the same *Deadly Guilt*, even with an *Habit* of *Lesser Sins*, being as Vicious in its *Rise*, and *Principle*, as *that* is, in its *End*, and *Operation*. For, this is a sort of *Spiritual Apoplexy*, that at Once amazes, stuns, and stupifies the Conscience, so that the *Soul* is for a long while unable to *Recover* its Sense, and Understanding: And such *Exorbitant Sins* seem to be, as it were, a *Compendium* of the *Malignity* of many small Ones, which indeed gain Ground upon Us, by *little* and *little*; and by *multiply'd Acts*, and a *deceitful Custom*, are render'd *Easy* and *Familiar*, and so *Gradually* and Insensibly *Decoy* the Sinner into their Yoke, and Slavery: But, such swelling *Presumptuous Sins*, like an *Impetuous Torrent*, Break in upon the Soul, overturn its State, and bear down its Faculties, with an irresistible Violence: At one Stroke, they gain so *compleat a Victory* over it, that 'tis almost *Irrecoverable* out of their *Dominion:* and having once gain'd the *Conquest*, they seldom fail to keep the *Captive* under their *Bondage*; and then, from frequent Repetitions, grow so *Habitual*, as at length to Superinduce, as 'twere, a *Necessity of Sinning*: For having *Eras'd* all the *Principles* of *Reason*, and *Distinctions* of *Good* and *Evil*, the *Lamp of the Lord* is quite Extinguish'd within, and the *Whole Man*, like the *Wandring Stars* in St. *Jude*, is Eclips'd with the *Blackness of Darkness for ever*; or to apply the beautiful Description of *Solomon*, of that *Emblem* of the foe Sins, the *Egyptian* Plague, *He is shut up as a Prisoner of Darkness, and fetter'd with the Bonds of a long Night, being exil'd from the Eternal Providence: he lies hid in his secret Sins, under a dark vail of Forgetfulness, being horribly astonish'd,* Verse 13. Wisd. 17. v. 2, 3, 14.

and ſleeping a ſleep, which is indeed intolerable, and which comes out of the bottom of inevitable Hell. So that, Arguments and Demonſtration, to one beſotted under theſe *infatuating Circumſtances*, are no better than a diſcourſe of *Colours* to the Blind; they can make no Impreſſion upon the *Intellectual Powers*, when they lye thus ſubdued, intoxicated, and confounded, by an headſtrong, and Tyrannical *Will*; ſuch an *abandon'd Wretch* obſtinately reſiſts and oppoſes all the beſt *means* of *Conviction*, and moſt proper *methods* of *Perſuaſion*, that God generally makes Uſe of to reclaim Sinners, and ſets himſelf with a pervicacious Malice againſt the brighteſt *Evidence* of *Truth*, and ſtrongeſt *Motives* of *Repentance*. The *Senſe* of *Conſcience* being thus loſt as 'twere in *the Sin of Witchcraft*, the Man Commences a *Devil Incarnate*, gets into a *Love* of, and *Complacency* in Miſchief, Embraces it *as ſuch*, and is ſo far from Committing it with *Shame* or *Remorſe*, that He arrives at that Superlative Perfection of Iniquity, even to *Glory in his Shame*, and Boaſt of his Folly. Men
Jer. 2. 2. of ſuch *harden'd Hearts*, and Whore's *Foreheads*, (as the Prophet ſpeaks)
Iſa. 2. 9. *refuſe to be Aſham'd, the ſhew of their Countenance doth witneſs againſt them, and they declare their Sin, as Sodom, they hide it not*, they muſt
Deut. 29. Stick at no Impiety, but take it in the Groſs, and *fall from Sin to Sin*,
Eph. 4. 19. *add Drunkenneſs to Thirſt*, and (as the *Apoſtle* excellently Deſcribes
18, 19. them) *having the Underſtanding Darken'd, being Alienated from the Life of God, thro' the Ignorance that is in them, becauſe of the Blindneſs of their hearts: Who being paſs'd feeling, have given themſelves over unto Laſciviouſneſs, to work all Uncleanneſs with Greedineſs.* Thus do theſe Mortal and Portentous Sins, *Naturally*, and in their *uſual, and genuin Effects*, firſt *Debauch*, and then *Murder* the *Conſcience*; and from an *Habitual perſeverance* in Sinning, induce a ſort of *Neceſſity* of it, and ſo bring a Man at length to a *Final Impenitency*. Which will further appear if We conſider,

4. Fourthly, *That theſe Preſumptuous Sins* JUDICIALLY *draw down the Wrath and Vengeance of God, upon Us, by Quenching his Holy Spirit within Us.* Every preſumptive Crime We are Guilty of, is ſaid
Eph. 4 30. *to Grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby We are Seal'd unto the Day of Re-*
Mat. 5 29. *demption*; and our Bleſſed Saviour has told Us, that his Grace ſhall be *taken away*, from even ſuch as *Neglect* and *Abuſe*, and therefore much more, from ſuch as *Deſpiſe*, and *Reproach* it. Tho' it cannot be denied that there is no *Degree* or *State* of Sin or *Infidelity*, howſoever tremendous, reſolute, and provoking, but the extraordinary, and miraculous Influence of the Divine Grace, is at any times able and ſuffi-

cient

cient to break through and subdue it, and in this case, upon Conviction and Repentance, Remission must certainly follow; yet for all that, God has expressly declar'd, that *his Spirit shall not always strive with Man,* and that He will withdraw the Necessary Aids and Supports of it, where they are Oppos'd with an opprobrious, and incorrigible Obstinacy; that *He will give his Grace only to the Humble, and that he resisteth the Proud*, and Contumacious; and consequently, it is a Position as highly consistent with the strictest Rules of *Reason* and *Justice*, as with the infinite *Mercy* and *Goodness* of God, that such Persons are *given over to a Reprobate Mind;* and being deserted by the Divine Grace, the onely Means of Reformation, are irrecoverably abandon'd to go on and continue in a State of Damnable Sin, and utter Impenitency; and so exclude themselves, and are excluded by God, out of the Terms of Forgiveness, *both in this World, and that which is to come.* And there seems not any Truth more clear or capable of Demonstration, from the Holy Scriptures, being of such vast Importance for the cautious Conduct of Human Life, than that dreadful *Period of Grace*, that *Limitation of a certain Day, or Time*, *Hebrews* 4. 7. wherein the *Measure of Our Iniquities is fulfill'd*, the *things which belong to Our Peace hidden from Our Eyes*, the Covenant Seal'd up, and no Admission or Acceptance granted to such *profane* Persons, who *fall from the Grace of God*, and *like* Esau, *have sold their Birth-right for a morsel of Meat;* who *when they would inherit the Blessing, are rejected, and can find no place of Repentance, tho' they seek it carefully, with Tears.* Such Men may in *vain seek the Lord when he cannot be found, and call upon him when he is not near; because He has called, and they refus'd, stretch'd out his hand, and no Man regarded; but they have set at naught all his Counsel, and would none of his Reproof. I also* (says God) *will laugh at their Calamity, and mock when Your Fear cometh; when your fear cometh as Desolation, and your destruction cometh as a Whirlwind, when Distress and Anguish cometh upon You: Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me, for that they hated Knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.* From these, and many other plain Passages of the Scriptures, the *Primitive Writers* have asserted the Doctrine of a Man's being under a *final and fatal Dereliction* of the *Blessed Spirit of God*; whereby he was *consign'd* over to the power of his Own *Lusts*, and the *Possession of the Devil*, who never fail'd to Enter with his Hellish Retinue, and Lodge in the forsaken Mansion. Tho' it is not so easy to Determine precisely, when this Terrible and Severe

Gen. 6. 3. Jam. 4. 6. Mat. 23. 32. Luk. 19. 42. Heb. 12. 15, 16, 17. Isa. 55. 6. Prov. 1. 24, &c.

Curſe happens to any Perſon; yet as 'twas certain, in the firſt Ages of the *Church*, for ſome time, after *Excommunication*; ſo 'tis more than Probable that it may now befall Men, after a long *Repetition* of many *Habitual*, and *Preſumptuous Sins*, perſever'd in, contrary to the frequent Threats and Commands of the *Holy Ghoſt*. And what a diſmal Con-
Exod. 32. 25. dition is this, to be *left naked* (as the Scriptures expreſs it) both of the Protection and Providence of God; to be Bereav'd of the onely Prin-
2 Chr. 28. 19. ciple of Vertue and Goodneſs in Us, and have Our *Bleſſed Comforter* and *Advocate, turn'd to be our Enemy, and to fight againſt Us*, as the Prophet
Iſa. 63. 10. deſcribes it! What elſe can be the Deplorable Conſequence of this frightful State, wherein Men *deſpiſe the riches of God's Goodneſs*,
Rom. 2. 4, 5. *forbearance, and long-ſuffering, which ſhould lead 'em to Repentance, and after their hardneſs and impenitent heart, treaſure up unto themſelves Wrath againſt the Day of Wrath, and revelation of the righteous Judgment of God*; but that he ſhould permit ſuch willful and Obdurate Wretches to fall into a *total Deſertion*, and *final Apoſtacy*, that *great Tranſgreſſion* which
Pſ. 19. 13. the *Pſalmiſt* probably means, as the uſual Reſult of being under *the Dominion of Preſumptuous Sins*; and which ſeems not obſcurely pointed out in that Grievous Sentence paſs'd upon them in our *Text*, in that Variety and Gradation of Expreſſion, as *that Soul ſhall be Cut off, from among his People, that Soul ſhall be utterly Cut off, and his Iniquity ſhall be upon him.* Which as the *Rabbinical Writers* generally underſtood of *Apoſtacy*, ſo it matters not, whether it was *Puniſh'd*, as ſome interpret this Place, with a *Temporal Death*, by the *immediate hand* of God, or his *Vice-Gerents*; or an *Eternal*, as others; both being eaſily conſiſtent and reconcilable together, and perhaps, the conſequence of each Other. However, by its Penalty, it appears to be one of the Greateſt Crimes, that Man can commit againſt God, or God can Puniſh with the ſevereſt Vengeance: it is that *Capital* Offence, that Summ-Total and Abridgment of Guilt, that muſt make a Man Renounce his Baptiſm, Deny his Saviour, Defy and Deſpiſe all Law, enter into an *Actual Hoſtility* againſt, and utter Abhorrence and Deteſtation of, God and his Providence. It is, in a Word, the Laſt, Superlative, *finiſh-*
Jam. 1. 15. *ing Stroke of Sin, which* (as the Apoſtle ſays) *bringeth forth Death*; Death *here*, and without God's infinite and *Uncovenanted Mercy, Death for ever* in the World hereafter. Which brings Me,

Laſtly, in a very few Words, to ſhew *the Prodigious Danger of theſe Preſumptuous Sins*, both, *firſt*, in *Regard to this Life*; and, *ſecondly, in regard to that which is to come.*

1. Now

1. Now were We here to Enumerate the many fearful Judgments and Calamities, the strange and unaccountable Disasters, that God's Providence has brought upon Men, in *this Life*, for these stupendous Sins, either in *Personal Visitations* on themselves, or *Vicarious Plagues* on their Posterity, inflicted on their *Souls*, *Bodies*, *Estates*, or *Reputations*, both Your Patience, and the Time would fail Me. Let that Notorious Example of *David*, in those *Presumptuous Sins* of *Murder*, and *Adultery*, suffice for All; whose *Repentance*, as well as *Punishment*, in all these Instances, were as eminently *remarkable*, as his *Crimes*. When God, by the *Mission* of a *Prophet*, had rous'd his Conscience out of that sad *Lethargy*, these Execrable Acts had cast it into, for the space of an whole Year, what a dismal Series of Afflictions, with the Delivery of his Pardon, at the same time, were Denounc'd as the *Natural Consequences* of that *Crying Guilt*, upon himself, and his wretched Family, *from whom the Sword was never to depart!* Insomuch, that his Whole Life after, together with the *Bloody Sacrifice* of his House, were as 'twere one continued Expiation of it; and happy was it for him, that God, by a *Peculiar* and almost *unprecedented Grace*, accepted his Penitential Sorrow in *this World*, in exchange and prevention of everlasting Misery in the *Next*; and suffer'd him, for a while, to lose his *Temporal Crown* here, that he might not forfeit his *Eternal* one, *hereafter*. 2 *Sam.* 12. 13.

2. To conclude, *It is the greatest Hazard, and a very important Question, not easily to be resolv'd, Whether any Person, under the Absolute Dominion of these Presumptuous Sins, ever comes to Repentance*, or *consequently, to Pardon for them*. The Holy Ghost speaks of this Lamentable Condition, as if it were in some measure Desperate and given over, and next to a *Moral Impossibility* to be Retriev'd, under that *Figure* (*Hyperbolical* only as We hope) of a *Leopard changing his Spots, and an Ethiopian his Skin*; at least thereby intimating, the frightful Hardship and Danger of conquering the power of these Habitual Presumptuous Vices. I have already shewn, how difficult this Matter is, with regard to *Natural Causes* and *Effects*, wherein We find the *Reason subdued*, the *Conscience Obliterated*, and the *Will* contumaciously bent on *Evil*: as well as with regard to the *future Dispensations of slighted Grace*, which seem to leave no room for any thing but *Despair*, and horrid Resolutions of *Persevering* in Sin, without Recovery. To which I need only add, by way of Illustration, some dreadful Denunciations of the Holy Scriptures relating to this purpose, which can never be too often In- *Jer.* 13. 23.

culcated

culcated on Our thoughts; and which seem not onely to refer to, but run Parallel with, the Text. St. *Peter* tells Us, *if after We have escap'd the pollutions of the World, thro' the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, We are agen therein intangl'd and overcome, the latter End is worse with Us, than the beginning. For it had been better for Us, not to have known the way of Righteousness, than after We have known it, to turn from the Holy Commandment deliver'd unto Us.* And St. *John* calls this a *Sin unto Death*, that is out of *the reach of Our Prayers*. But the *Author* of the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* raises this point to a more Exalted Strain. *It is impossible* (says He) *for those who were once Enlighten'd, and have tasted of the Heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the World to come; If they shall fall away, to renew them agen unto Repentance; seeing they Crucify to themselves, the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the Earth which drinketh in the rain, that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them, by whom it is dress'd, receiveth Blessing from God: But that which beareth Thorns and Bryars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burnt.* And that We may not mistake the Apostle's sense, 'tis agen repeated and illustrated, Chap. X. vers. 26, &c. *If We Sin wilfully after that We have receiv'd the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins: But a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries. He that despis'd Moses's Law, dyed without Mercy, under two or three Witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose Ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath troden under foot, the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith He was Sanctify'd, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace? For We know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompence, saith the Lord; And agen, the Lord shall Judge his People. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.* From all which Passages, some Learned Interpreters have drawn this Conclusion, That if in the *Mosaick Law* there was no *Attonement*, by *Sacrifice*, for *Presumptuous Sins*, but the Guilt of them was to rest upon the head of the Offender; by *Analogy*, it follows, that under the *Christian Dispensation*, of which that was a *Type*, there can be by the *Merits* of *Christ*, no *Expiation* made for them, habitually continued in, or not retracted by a *bitter, thorough*, and PARTICULAR Repentance, *a Repentance not to be repented of*; without which, our Blessed Saviour's sufferings can never be apply'd to the Criminal thus *Dying in his Sins*, who must

2 Ep. 2. 20, 21.

1 Joh. 5. 16

Chap. 6. 4, 5, &c.

must be thereby inevitably deliver'd over to Eternal Destruction. This Doctrine, at first sight, may seem very Terrible, and Severe; and it may be reply'd, if these things are so, *what Flesh can be sav'd?* It must be confess'd indeed, that this is the Rigour of the Law, and *tho' this seems impossible or very hard, with Men, yet all things are possible with God:* We must remember, there is no *Abatement*, or *Dispensation* in the *Conditions* of the *Covenant*; and if there may be any *Extraordinary Instances* of God's *superabundant* and *unpromis'd* Mercy, in *snatching some, like Firebrands out of the Fire*, by his *mighty Hand and stretch'd out Arm*, as in those wonderful Examples of *David*, and *Solomon*, yet are such surprizing and Singular Presidents to be look'd upon as the Miraculous and Transcendent *Over-flowings* of the Divine Grace, willing to display its Omnipotence and Glory, in its *Exceeding Riches* and *Power*; and no more to be depended on, in the *ordinary Course* of Providence, than that of the *Penitent Thief* on the Cross; or that a Man should *Presumptuously* expect to be heal'd of a *Plague*, or a *Feaver* by *Inspiration*, or a *Voice from Heaven*. Repentance is the *Gift of God*, not the *Power of Nature*, and sad Experience will tell Us, that where one Man has, in these Desperate Cases, happily obtain'd it, a Thousand for ought we know, have sunk into Eternal Perdition, without it.

Mat. 19. 26.

Eph. 2. 7.

What is here urg'd ought to be so far from deterring Us in the Pursuit of Repentance for these Sins, that it should be the strongest Motive to *incite* our *Zeal*, and *quicken* our *Industry*, and to *awaken* our *Consciences* out of this fatal Repose, to shake off this deadly *Spirit of Slumber*, (as the Apostle expresses it) and to view the dreadful Danger we are encompass'd with; lest these clamorous Iniquities, like the *Voice* of *Abel*'s *Blood*, *cry aloud* to Heaven for that Vengeance, which nothing can stop but *his Blood, that speaketh better things than that of Abel*. The Sense whereof should engage our utmost Endeavours to *prevent*, or *recover* our selves out of them, by a constant and vigilant Attention to the *Voice of God*, speaking in the *Conscience*; by a stead-fast and unshaken Adherence to the great Principles of our Duty and Religion; by despising the vain Pomps, empty Allurements, and deceitful Pleasures and Enjoyments of this World; by mortifying the Craving and Importunate Commands of our *Pride*, *Ambition*, *Lust*, or *Avarice*; and denying our *Passions*, even sometimes, in *things Lawful*; by abstaining not only from *lesser Sins*, but the very first *motions* and *Appearance of Evil*; and never trusting our selves within the *Contagion*

Rom. 11. 8.

Gen. 4. 10. *Heb.* 12. 24.

of

of Vice, or the *Purlieus of Death.* And, Laſtly, ſince We *are not able to do any thing as of our ſelves*, and God permits ſometimes the Wiſeſt and Beſt of Men, to fall into *this horrible Pit*, this direful and amazing Guilt, We muſt have a *continual*, and *fervent* Recourſe to his *Grace*, which *alone can Govern the unruly Affections of ſinful Men*; that out of his infinite Mercy, and Compaſſion to *Human Frailty*, He would kindly prevent and aſſiſt us, under all the deluding Wiles and Power of the Devil, and his Temptations; and that in the excellent Prayer of
Pſ. 19. 13. the *Penitential Pſalmiſt*, *Keep back thy Servants, O Lord, from Preſumptuous Sins, and let them not have the Dominion over Us; ſo ſhall We be Up-*
Deut. 17. 13. *right, and Innocent from the Great Tranſgreſſion:* And God grant, *that We may all hear, and fear, and do no more Preſumptuouſly.*

FINIS.

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